

BRITISH DOCUMENTS ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS:

REPORTS AND PAPERS FROM
THE FOREIGN OFFICE
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MR. Stevenson to Mr. Eden

*– Arrival at Montevideo of two ships carrying
German prisoners of war. -*

- Uruguay severe drought. -



RALPH SKRINE STEVENSON
February 26, 1943

Mr. Stevenson to Mr. Eden. - (Received February 26.)

(No. 15.)

Sir,

Montevideo, February 6, 1943.

I HAVE the honour to enclose, herein, copy of a signal (1) received by the naval attaché to this legation from the Director of Sea Transport announcing the arrival at Montevideo of two ships carrying German prisoners of war, proposing the transshipment of some of these prisoners of war at Montevideo, and asking confirmation that the necessary arrangements could be carried out.

2. This matter has been satisfactorily settled, and I am only bringing it to your notice in order, first, to demonstrate the exceeding goodwill of the Uruguayan Government, and, secondly, to record a case which may be of interest in the future when the time comes, as it may, to define the meaning and scope in international law of a state of "non-belligerency".

3. On the receipt of the enclosed telegram (1) I visited the Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs, Señor Gerona, who is himself a lawyer of considerable standing in this country, explained the matter to him, and put forward the contention that, although in the case of a neutral country such prisoners of war would have a claim for release, Uruguay's status of non-belligerency made the provisions of the Fifth Hague Convention inapplicable. I pointed out that the Uruguayan Government had themselves, in fact, already recognised that the status of Uruguay was not that of a neutral, and I supported this argument by citing the far from neutral action taken by the Uruguayan Government in according non-belligerent status to His Majesty's ships, in permitting the storage in Montevideo of munitions and other war material, and in agreeing to the landing on uniformed men of His Majesty's forces.

5. The following day he informed me that the Uruguayan Government would have no objection to the transshipment of the prisoners in the port of Montevideo nor to their continued presence in the port while the ship was loading. He asked that the transshipment should be effected in the ante-port and as unostentatiously as possible, and that the ship should remain in the ante-port while loading. He added that if the Spanish Minister, who is charged with the protection of German interests, should hear of the presence of these prisoners and should demand their release, the Uruguayan Government would reply in the sense that the relevant Hague Convention was not applicable in this case in view of Uruguay's status of non-belligerency. He would prefer, however, to avoid having to argue the question with the Spanish Legation, and would be grateful

if the prisoners could be kept out of the way while the loading was going on and if the crews of the ships concerned and the guards could be warned against talking.

6. I readily agreed to these stipulations and to a further suggestion that there was no need for us to exchange any correspondence on the subject. A telegram has accordingly been sent to the Director of Sea Transport by the naval attaché informing him of the agreement of the Uruguayan authorities, and the naval attaché is arranging all the details with the Inspector-General of the Uruguayan navy and the captain of the Port of Montevideo.

7. I thanked Señor Gerona very cordially for his helpfulness, and expressed my deep appreciation of the friendly and co-operative attitude of the Uruguayan Government in this and other matters on which I had occasion to ask for their assistance. I suggest, however, that you might instruct me, unless you have any objection, to convey a message of appreciation from His Majesty's Government.

I have, &c.

RALPH SKRINE STEVENSON.

Mr. Stevenson to Mr. Eden. - (Received March 18.)

(No. 16 E.)

Sir,

Montevideo, February 16, 1943.

THE very severe drought which, since October last, has afflicted this country is now reaching such proportions as seriously to affect the national economy.

2. According to local expert over 1 1/2 million animals have already died, and the financial loss is computed at some 50 million pesos. While cattle-breeders can see only too clearly the disastrous after-effects of such mortality on livestock during the next few years, the immediate prospect is in itself sufficiently disquieting to warrant the prevailing pessimism. Within a comparatively short period it is expected that the number of cattle destined for slaughter in the freezing plants will have become so reduced as to diminish appreciably not only the supply required for the population of Montevideo, but also the export of tinned meat to the United Kingdom. As a natural corollary, and apart from the effects which this may have on one of Great Britain's sources of supply in war-time, the reduction over the course of the next year or two by one-half, or even one-third, of Uruguay's staple exports meats, hides and wool may place this country, in any post war adjustment of quotas, in a most unfavourable position. Moreover, any reduction in Uruguay's normal means of payment is likely to create an obstacle for future Anglo Uruguayan trade. Attention to this aspect of the matter has already been drawn in a recent "Buletin" issued by the "Association for the Promotion of Anglo-Uruguayan Trade" ("A.F.T.C.A.U."), a copy of which is enclosed herewith.

3. Action by the Uruguayan Government has so far been confined to approaching the Government of Argentina and Brazil with a view to transferring livestock to the bordering, and better pastured, districts of those two countries a request which has met with no success owing to the drought conditions prevailing there also. Local livestock-breeders have, accordingly, been endeavouring to forward to the frigoríficos all their available cattle, irrespective of the condition of the animals and of the lower prices being paid.

In this, however, they have been seriously handicapped by the inadequacy of transport facilities, caused by the acute shortage of the fuel. Fuel shortage, again, has to a large extent nullified the efforts of those breeder who, in the hope of saving at least a part of their herds, have bought large stocks of forage in Montevideo and Buenos Aires, only to find in many cases, when the bales have reached their destination by rail, that transport from the country station to

the *estancia* is impossible owing to lack of petrol, while the poor condition of horses and bullocks precludes their use for this purpose.

4. Further Government action will probably have to be taken, presumably by means of grants and special facilities for reimbursement, in respect of other immediate problems of an internal nature arising from the drought, such as the loss of crops and the probability of increasingly widespread distress amongst the populations of the country districts. In this latter connexion a newspaper of the capital recently announced that in one of the northern departments of the republic hitherto honest people had been driven, through sheer necessity, to rob and steal.

5. The situation is, indeed, as the A.F.I.C.A.U. "Bulletin" describes it, one of grim tragedy, possibly all the grimmer because the tragedy could have been relieved to a considerable extent by the timely adoption of modern methods of water supply, irrigation and silage. Here and there in the country there are cattle breeders who have had the foresight in recent years to dig artesian wells and install "Australian tanks" in adequate numbers on their properties, to build silos, and to devote a considerable acreage to sudan grass. But such cases are, unfortunately, isolated ones.

6. I am sending a copy of this despatch to His Majesty's Ambassador at Buenos Aires and to the Department of Overseas Trade.

I have, &c.

RALPH SKRINE STEVENSON.